

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## Secretary Clinton and Cal Ripken Jr. Host Young Japanese Athletes

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington – Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. baseball icon Cal Ripken Jr. met with young Japanese baseball and softball players as part of the Department of State's first international sports exchange with Japan.

Clinton said hosting the 16 athletes and four of their coaches offered a "particularly meaningful" opportunity for Americans to express their continued support for Japan as the country rebuilds from a devastating earthquake and tsunami. Each of the athletes, who range in age from 14 to 17, was affected by the March 11 disaster.

"The Japanese people have shown great resilience, and they are pulling together to support each other," Clinton said at the State Department reception for the exchange August 9. She said sports offer a great way to bring people together, and can play an important role in overcoming adversity.

Ripken also spoke at the reception and expressed his excitement to work with the Japanese delegation in his position as a public diplomacy envoy. The record-setting sports star has served in the role since 2007, the same year he was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Calling Japan a "wonderful nation that loves baseball," Ripken said he looks forward to spending time with the country's young ballplayers.

The Japanese athletes and their coaches are scheduled to participate in baseball clinics, to see a professional baseball game in Baltimore and to attend the Little League Baseball World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, during their August 8-23 visit. Ripken will lead them in baseball and softball clinics, and will also host team-building exercises with the Japanese youth and American counterparts.

After working with the delegation in the United States, Ripken will travel to Japan in November to visit the students in their hometowns. That will be Ripken's third trip as a public diplomacy envoy, the State Department said: In 2007 he traveled to China, and in 2008 he visited Nicaragua.

The United States hosts sports visitor programs to "bring people together for greater understanding" and to "engage youth in a dialogue on the importance of education, positive health practices and respect for diversity," according to a State Department news release

August 9. Clinton said the programs also help young people around the world to translate success on the field to the development of life skills and achievement in the classroom. The sports exchange with Japan is hosted by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the Cal Ripken World Series, the Little League World Series and Ripken Baseball.

The Japanese athletes are next scheduled to take part in a training camp hosted by the Baltimore Orioles on August 11. Ripken played 21 years for the Orioles before retiring in October 2001.

## U.S. Treasury Imposes Sanctions Against Syria's Largest Bank

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington – The United States has imposed financial sanctions on Syria's largest commercial bank and its largest mobile telephone operator, according to the U.S. Treasury Department.

Treasury announced the sanctions August 10 against the Commercial Bank of Syria, a Syrian state-owned financial institution, and its Lebanon-based subsidiary, Syrian Lebanese Commercial Bank, under a presidential executive order. It also announced sanctions against Syriatel, the largest mobile phone operator in Syria, under another presidential executive order.

"By exposing Syria's largest commercial bank as an agent for designated Syrian and North Korean proliferators, and by targeting Syria's largest mobile phone operator for being controlled by one of the regime's most corrupt insiders, we are taking aim at the financial infrastructure that is helping provide support to [President Bashar al-] Assad and his regime's illicit activities," Treasury Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen said in a prepared statement.

The sanctions are cited under two presidential executive orders – one that targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their supporters, and another that targets Syrian officials and others responsible for human rights abuses in Syria.

The Treasury action prevents U.S. citizens and businesses from doing any business with them, but it also freezes assets of the Syrian businesses that may be held under U.S. jurisdiction.

The Treasury announcement in Washington comes as President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and other U.S. officials have urged President Bashar al-Assad to halt attacks by his government's troops on pro-reform demonstrators in several regions of

the country. Syrian military forces — armored columns and infantry snipers — fired on civilians and pro-democracy demonstrators in the city of Hama in central Syria on August 10. The pro-reform movement began five months ago, inspired in part by the pro-reform movements in other nations of the Middle East and North Africa.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said during his daily press briefing August 10 that the international community has been speaking with one voice in condemning Assad's "brutality against his people."

"I think we have made clear that we believe, the president believes, that Syria would be better off without President Assad," Carney told reporters. "Through his own actions, President Assad is ensuring that he and his regime will be left in the past, and that the courageous Syrian people who have demonstrated peacefully in the streets will determine its future."

Carney said the United States believes that a democratic transition would be better for Syria, the region and the world, and the United States will continue to apply pressure on the Assad regime.

"We continue to call on the regime to immediately halt its campaign of violence and arrests, pull its security forces back, release the many thousands of detainees, and to respect and act upon the clear demands of the Syrian people for a peaceful and democratic transition," he said.

#### BANKS CITED

The Commercial Bank of Syria, a Syrian state-owned financial institution based in Damascus with approximately 50 branches, was designated for providing financial services to Syria's Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) and North Korea's Tanchon Commercial Bank (Tanchon). SSRC and Tanchon were listed in a June 2005 presidential order for their support for WMD proliferation by Syria and North Korea, the Treasury Department says. The Syrian Lebanese Commercial Bank was designated for being owned or controlled by the Commercial Bank of Syria.

"SSRC controls Syria's missile production facilities and oversees Syria's facilities to develop unconventional weapons and their delivery systems," Treasury said. "The Commercial Bank of Syria has continued to provide financial services to the SSRC and associated companies following the SSRC's designation, including the maintenance of bank accounts and financing for purchases that permit the SSRC and associated companies to advance Syria's WMD programs."

Treasury cited an incident in 2010 in which SSRC

arranged financing through the Commercial Bank of Syria for missile-related purchases.

The Commercial Bank of Syria also holds an account for Tanchon, the primary financial agent for the Korea Mining Development Corporation (KOMID), North Korea's premier arms dealer and main exporter of goods and equipment related to ballistic missiles and conventional weapons, Treasury said. KOMID was also listed in the presidential order.

The designations were previously raised by Treasury regarding the Commercial Bank of Syria, which has also engaged in dealings with several Iranian banks designated by Treasury under another presidential order, including the Export Development Bank of Iran, Bank Saderat and Bank Melli.

The Commercial Bank of Syria was identified by Treasury as "a financial institution of primary money laundering concern" under the 2004 USA PATRIOT Act in May 2004.

"The Commercial Bank of Syria remains in control of much of the Syrian banking market and controls most public sector contracts," Treasury said.

The Treasury Department said that Syriatel, the largest mobile phone operator in Syria, was designated for being owned or controlled by Rami Makhluf, a powerful Syrian businessman and regime insider identified in a February 2008 executive order for improperly benefiting from and aiding the public corruption of Syrian regime officials.

#### U.S. Sends Research Teams on Hunt for AIDS Cure

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — For the first time in the 30-year history of HIV/AIDS, scientists and doctors see a path that could lead to a cure for the disease that has taken more than 25 million lives worldwide.

Three U.S. research groups are launching new strategies after receiving funds from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) of the National Institutes of Health.

"HIV has been an incurable, lifelong infection that at best sentences people to a lifetime of complex drug therapies," said Dr. Keith Jerome, a co-principal investigator of the NIAID-backed study at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. "Now the research field is shifting to address the possibility of a cure. No one would have talked about this approach five years ago."

In its first year alone, NIAID is investing \$14 million in the research on the basis of preliminary data suggesting ways that HIV could be subdued or suppressed, said Carl

W. Dieffenbach, director of NIAID's Division of AIDS.

"I won't say that we have a road map to the cure," Dieffenbach said in an interview. "You have a set of questions and hypotheses that need to be addressed, and then you go where the research leads you."

Along with the Hutchinson Center, NIAID is providing funding for two other groups to pursue the research: the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill and the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) with the Vaccine & Gene Therapy Institute of Florida. Each group will be pursuing a different hypothesis on a potential cure.

The Hutchinson Center will investigate whether gene therapy techniques can lead to a method of making cells genetically resistant to the HIV virus. The UNC group aims to find out how the HIV virus can "hide" in a patient's tissues, forming reservoirs, even when the patient is on a drug regimen and the virus seems to have retreated. The UCSF team will work toward a better understanding of how the viral reservoirs are maintained and whether they can be eliminated.

Even while this work gets under way, Dieffenbach said the definition of "cure" might be flexible as researchers discover the boundaries of the possible. "HIV may still be detected in the body," Dieffenbach suggests hypothetically, "but there is no circulating viral load. The individual does not progress to AIDS [disease], nor does the person have the ability to transmit the disease."

Dieffenbach is also careful in defining the possibility of "eradicating" HIV. Does that mean culling the virus from one person's system? Or does eradication mean the virus has been purged from the universe of microbes, never to appear again? "Maybe if we can succeed at starting to cure people of HIV infection, we can use [that finding] as part of a set of tools that may get us there."

While the course of research into an HIV/AIDS cure is still speculative, Dieffenbach said the possibility alone has brought an immediate psychological benefit for people living with HIV or people afraid to learn their HIV status. It provides motivation for individuals to learn their HIV status, Dieffenbach said, and if the result is positive, to remain as healthy as possible and seek treatment until the day a cure is available to them.

Other recent research findings have served as morale boosters in the AIDS community. New evidence indicates that prolonged anti-retroviral drug treatment helps an individual patient maintain quality of life, and also prevents transmission to others by reducing the level of HIV in bodily fluids. This finding was presented at a July meeting in Rome of the International AIDS Society,

attended by U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Eric Goosby.

"These developments are transforming the way we think about AIDS," Goosby said in a blog post July 29.

The meeting ended with adoption of the Rome Statement for an HIV Cure, calling for an acceleration of HIV cure research. The statement also emphasized the importance of a safe, accessible cure that can be widely adopted in rich and poor countries.

### **Program Helps Kids Heal from Terrorism's Traumas**

By Lauren Monsen | Staff Writer

Washington — Reclaiming hope from the embers of tragedy is a daunting task, but a nonprofit group called Tuesday's Children helps people traumatized by terrorism connect with each other and rebuild their lives.

Created to meet the needs of families who lost relatives in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Tuesday's Children has broadened its scope to help teenagers worldwide. The group's program for this mission is Project Common Bond, which aims to unite young people aged 15-20 from around the world who have lost family members to an act of terror.

Launched in 2008, Project Common Bond has served more than 200 young people from Argentina, Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Ireland and Northern Ireland, Liberia, Spain, Russia, Sri Lanka and the United States, said program director Kathy Murphy. Participants from Russia — a country new to the program — are survivors of the Beslan school hostage crisis of September 2004, in which at least 334 people were killed, including 186 children.

Project Common Bond hosts an annual eight-day camp at which participants typically forge strong ties and learn to support each other through grieving and adjusting to their losses, Murphy said.

The camp's curriculum, designed by Harvard University, teaches coping and conflict resolution. It features personal storytelling so young people can share their reactions to the terrorist incidents that changed their lives. "The kids loved it," Murphy said. "Some have told us they'll pursue [college] studies in conflict negotiation or global studies."

Murphy said the camp participants learn how to listen to each other. "The skills they learn are important skills for any of us to have. They'll take these skills home to their families, to their schools, and teach others to use them." The curriculum, Murphy said, helps participants answer fundamental questions: "When you find yourself getting upset, how do you calm yourself? How do you take that pain and turn it into something positive?"



But there's plenty of time for having fun. The program offers elective courses — art, theater, music, dance and sports — and participants stage a talent show.

This year's camp was held at the Foxcroft School in Middleburg, Virginia, near Washington. The campers "were phenomenal," Murphy said. "You could tell they all wanted to be there. One said, 'This week gives me the strength to get through the whole year, until we meet again.'"

Many camp participants return year after year. When they exceed the age limit, some return as counselors to help newcomers.

The camp's graduates almost always stay in touch, often through social-media networks, including a Project Common Bond page on Facebook. "It's exploding" with messages, Murphy said. "They're missing each other."

### **Gallup Poll Finds Muslim Americans Hopeful, Trusting**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — A new Gallup Poll shows that Muslim Americans living in the United States feel more hopeful and consider themselves better off than they did three years ago.

"They see themselves as loyal to the U.S. and express trust in its democratic institutions," the public opinion polling company said in a statement. But the opinion survey also shows that at least half of those polled said they have experienced some degree of prejudice.

The opinion survey, "Muslim Americans: Faith, Freedom, and the Future," is based on interviews conducted by telephone from February 10 to March 11, 2010, and October 1 to October 21, 2010, as part of Gallup's daily tracking survey. Gallup officials said the large samples from this poll provide an often "rare, in-depth look at how Muslim Americans compare with other major faith groups" in the United States.

The Gallup report was released in Washington on August 2 and is based on findings from the Abu Dhabi Gallup Center, which is a Gallup-affiliated research group based in the United Arab Emirates. The poll involved interviews with 2,482 adults, of whom 475 said they were Muslim, and the poll has an error margin of plus or minus 7 percentage points for the Muslim respondents, Gallup said. The poll also reflects nearly three years of research into Muslim American attitudes.

The survey, which comes nearly 10 years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, covered four major areas: law enforcement and terrorism,

American democratic institutions, profiling and discrimination, and religion and tolerance.

Senior analyst Mohamed Younis of the Abu Dhabi Center cited a few of the study's findings:

- Muslim Americans are the most likely of the major faith groups in the United States to reject violent attacks against civilians.
- Muslim Americans are the most critical in their opinions of the institutions and interventions associated with counterterrorism.
- Muslim Americans identify equally with the United States and their religious affiliation.
- Muslim Americans who attend religious services at least once a week have higher levels of civic engagement and report less stress and anger than do other U.S. Muslims who attend religious services less frequently.
- Muslim Americans are often similar to Jewish Americans in their views and perceptions of major issues.

Jocelyne Cesari of Harvard University said at the presentation in Washington that the Gallup study confirms several trends researchers have been studying in recent years. She said the study, for example, confirms that "the more Muslim you are, the more civic you are," and that "Muslims tend to trust major institutions in the country in which they live."

The Gallup study also found that 90 percent or more of Muslim Americans were not sympathetic to the transnational terrorist group al-Qaida or its actions.

The size of the Muslim-American population has proved difficult to measure because the U.S. census does not track religious affiliation. Estimates vary widely from 2 million to 7 million. What is clear, however, is that the Muslim-American population has been growing rapidly as a result of immigration, a high birth rate and conversions.

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